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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2000

Draft report

Addendum

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II. Documentation and publication-related matters

A. Distribution of documentation

Introduction and overview

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 54/248 of 23 December 1999, reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to ensure that documentation was available in accordance with the six-week rule for the distribution of documents simultaneously in the six official languages; urged intergovernmental bodies, when feasible, to become more actively involved in rationalizing their meeting schedules in order to ensure the timely distribution of all related documentation; and requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals based on the reviews through the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

2. At its 430th meeting, on 7 August 2000, the Committee considered a note by the Secretariat (A/AC.172/2000/6) containing proposals aimed at improving the timely issuance of pre-session documentation, the first two requiring action by the Secretariat and the remaining four requiring action by intergovernmental organs. The proposals were:

Proposal 1

Three months prior to the opening of the session, a planning meeting or an equivalent exchange of communications should be held between the servicing secretariat and the substantive department, on the one hand, and representatives of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, on the other, to review documentation forecasts, bearing in mind the 10-week rule for document submission and the requirement to issue a document on the status of documentation.

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Proposal 2

Substantive departments should prepare forecasts of the volume of documentation under preparation and be required, to the extent possible, to keep the length of their submissions within the limits of their original forecast. Such forecasts should be presented to the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and to the servicing secretariats in conjunction with the planning meeting.

Proposal 3

In order to minimize the negative impact of late submissions by one intergovernmental organ on the timely issuance of documents for other organs, late submissions could be processed by rescheduling the processing of other documents submitted by the same department for consideration in the same body.

Proposal 4

Intergovernmental organs should review their reporting cycles, and periodicity may be introduced in the reporting in the form of requesting quarterly or biannual reports instead of annual ones.

Proposal 5

Intergovernmental organs may wish to authorize substantive departments to prepare reports and submit them for processing in accordance with the 10-week rule, even if all the relevant information is not available and, if it is necessary to include additional information, subsequently submit addendums to the parent document.

Proposal 6

While reviewing the status of documentation in preparation for the sessions, secretariats and bureaux of intergovernmental bodies may wish to decide, in cases of recurrent late submissions, to adjust the proposed programme of work and, as appropriate, adjust the order of agenda items and delay or postpone consideration of items or documents.

Discussion

3. Delegations expressed the view that the proposals represented an excellent initiative and deserved support. It was suggested that the initiative could go even further, for example, in promoting close collaboration between the bureaux of intergovernmental bodies and author departments with regard to rescheduling. Reference was made to the requirement that author departments explain in a footnote why their submissions did not comply with the 10-week rule. A compendium of guidelines on procedures for effective and efficient use of conference services was thought to be a valuable tool for this and other areas of conference servicing.

Conclusions and recommendations

4. The Committee welcomed the development of the draft proposals and supported the implementation of draft proposals 1 and 2 by the Secretariat. It endorsed draft proposals 3, 4, 5 and 6 and recommended to the General

Assembly that they should be formulated as recommendations to intergovernmental bodies.

5. The Committee also requested the Secretariat to prepare a compendium of guidelines on procedures for effective and efficient use of conference services and urged it to continue to draft proposals aimed at improving the timely issuance of pre-session documentation.